

Illinois Fall Color Report – Oct. 8, 2021



Northern Illinois

In northeast Illinois, tree watchers report some maples are starting to show their colors of red and orange. Warmer-than-usual early October weather may slow the transition. It may be another week or two before oak tree colors begin to peak. Walnuts are beginning to turn yellow, with some white oaks beginning to brown amid the mostly green view in the woodlands. Sassafras is starting to turn up the color, and black oaks are starting to blush a bit where found in sand. Vines are turning quickly, with poison ivy and Virginia creeper turning brilliant shades of red and purple, while grape is beginning to yellow up in places.



Central Illinois

Yellow seems to be the predominant fall shade in much of central Illinois this week, especially in areas where drought conditions persist. Familiar views of reds and purples

on the trees may be lacking due to the stress of dry weather, with a lot of trees already dropping their leaves. Leaf reporters tell of some oranges in sugar maples and sassafras and a few reds in sumacs, poison ivy, and burgundy in the dogwoods.



Many of the roadside wildflowers are in good color, including goldenrod, wild sunflowers, and the purple New England asters. Osage orange trees are hanging heavy softball size light green to yellow fruits. Oaks are starting to drop acorns and buckeyes are dropping, as well.

In west central Illinois, some leaf color change was reported in the region. Cottonwoods, silver maples, walnuts, pawpaw, Osage oranges, mulberries, catalpas, and buckeyes are starting to yellow. Sugar maples and ash are starting to show yellow, red, gold, purple and orange. Patches of sumac and individual sassafras and dogwoods are steadily reddening. Oak leaves are still stubbornly holding green.

Elsewhere in the region, ginkgo is starting to turn gold, hackberry is showing a lot of yellow, and some maples are getting colorful. Virginia creeper is dropping its bright crimson leaves. Understory trees in the woodlands are showing yellows and browns. Some ornamental black gums are throwing a lot of brilliant red leaves.

In east central Illinois, black walnuts are showing yellow, as are some persimmons, with sassafras showing orange and red in some areas.

The upland forest in mid Illinois is beginning to show light yellows and reds with some hues of red/orange. Cooler nights and warm sunny days ahead should bring the best fall color.

In the lowland/bottomland/riverine forest area across central Illinois, more yellows are expected due to lack of oak and hickory on those sites. Numerous species turning yellow on low forests include walnut, cottonwood, elm, hackberry, hedge, and ash trees.

Where there are sugar maples in town and on uplands, the maples are turning orange and red on about a third to a half of their leaves.

Central region trees are probably another 10 days to two weeks from hitting peak color.

Southern Illinois

In southern Illinois, a few sweet gums are starting to show yellow and red leaves, with sassafras starting to show yellow and red and some white ash trees showing purple hues.

In the south, some black and sour gum trees have red color among about a third of their leaves, with about half the leaves in red on sumac. Green ash trees are showing some yellow leaves that are dropping fast. Tulip poplar and sycamore trees have yellowing on leaves on about a third of their branches.

Bald cypress at Cache River State Natural Area are beginning to show orange, red, brown and copper shades, while black walnuts have lost most their leaves. Oaks are still mainly green.

Some spotters have observed yellow colors in elm, pawpaw, maple, sycamore, basswood, and tulip poplar trees. In southeastern Illinois, hilltop or drought-dry areas have seen a bit of leaf color change – and leaf fall. Ashes everywhere are dropping their yellow leaves early due to emerald ash borer.

In swamps, bald cypress needles have started to turn yellow and orange. Some black cherry, tulip poplar, and sweetgum have a couple scattered red, yellow, and purple leaves among their green leaves.

